

Canadian Reminiscences of Totley

Years ago, my husband John and I were lucky enough to have two sabbatical years in Sheffield, while he was at the University. In our first year, 1975-6, the University arranged for us to rent 22 Abbeydale Park Rise for the year. Our children, Ian and Megan, were very young, and when we arrived, I wondered if they actually spoke the same language as the other children. However it turned out that our children and the next door neighbour's children, Paul and Lisa Cousins, bonded immediately. The dialect did not matter at all.

It was a wonderful year for us, as John loved working at the University, and I just puttered about, discovering well-dressings, and other things that had been completely foreign to us. Ian went to Totley Primary school, and I would pick him up after school and make our way down the rise. Megan went to a little nursery up the rise, run by a lovely woman, Mrs. Marsh. Megan was 3, and called her Mrs. Martian – an appellation that the infinitely patient Mrs. Marsh minded not at all. Aside from Paul and Lisa, there were many neighbourhood children who became friends – Simon, Megan's age, just across the road, was one.

It was the year of the big drought, where standpipes were threatened throughout Sheffield, although they never turned up on our street. As the water table fell, one could see the town that had been flooded for the Ladybower Reservoir. The remnants of those buildings stuck up through the fading waters. It was quite a sight.

We watched a major Cricket Match on the Abbeydale Playing grounds from our upstairs bedroom windows at 22 Abbeydale Park rise. I am now told that perhaps Ian Botham played against the West Indian contingent at that time. Maybe. Perhaps a reader can tell us if that is right.

Our drives into the Pennines, walkabouts, and many tours made for a memorable year. Our Vauxhall (you recall the old joke 'you vaux there and vaux all the way back') did punk out on us on many occasions – once in the Loire valley, but, more memorably for me, when I was driving home on the dual carriageway, and just over the hump towards Devonshire Rd, changed gears and found myself holding the clutch in my hand, separated from the car. I glided into the then garage, and the lovely mechanics simply told me this was a genetic problem with Vauxhalls.

I also remember with great fondness the 2p ride on the buses from the farthest stop on the Sheffield line, at the Cross Scythes, where the buses turned in.

Seven years later, and on another sabbatical, we wanted to return and did return to Totley. Such a lovely place to land. If I recall correctly, Jimmy Martin's was still the place to buy newspapers at the little plaza, and now our children went to different schools. Ian went to King Egberts, which then was in two different locations (Mercia and Wessex was it?) and Megan entered middle school. Our second rental home was a little farther up, at 7 Terrey Road, and again, we found some terrific neighbours. Ian and John became immersed in snooker, and went often to the pool hall on the London Road, and then, of course, to the Crucible, and saw the great Steve Davis. There were also several Canadian players, including Mike Werbenuk who drank copious amounts of lager while he played. A true Canadian.

That was a year filled with wonderful memories. Kath from 24 Abbeydale came for dinner with us, her husband Fred had by then died. I am old that Kath now lives in a Totley Nursing home.

So this year, 27 years later, our son Ian now lives in London and has become a British citizen, and we decided to return to Totley. Normally, we visit Ian in London for a week, take another week 'elsewhere' (I am an amateur genealogist, so most self-catering cottages we take for a second week involve other areas than Sheffield for research interests) but this spring we decided to return to our 'real roots' – Totley. It did not disappoint.

Although King Egberts on two campuses, (as we knew it is gone) as is Jimmy Martin's, much remains the same. We rented a lovely cottage (Moorlands) in Totley Bents, and did many walkabouts.

We tried to knock on doors on Terrey Rd to no avail but as we approached 22 Abbeydale Park Rise to ask to take photos, the lovely people at 20 asked if they 'could help'. Indeed they could. Bill and Fidelma Stark invited us in and called our former neighbours the Cousins who had lived at 20 on our first sabbatical and now live in Dore. The Starks could not have been lovelier to absolute strangers. We remain in touch.

I know you in Sheffield and particularly, you in SW Sheffield know you live in a kind of God's country, but the return for us was splendid – the library, the pubs, the wonderful walks.... You are lucky. As are we.

Gail and John Benjafield

St. Catharines ON Canada